

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Elana Atlas; I am from Westport, CT. I am a supporter of CT Against Gun violence, as well as the leader of the Westport chapter of Students Demand Action and Connecticut Students Demand Action's Virtual Field Office, and I am testifying in favor of HB-6355, An Act Concerning Risk Protection Orders.

Strong extreme risk laws save lives. The studies and the facts have proven this to us, time and time again.

The shooting in Parkland, Florida on Valentine's Day of 2018 could have been prevented if there existed a clear way to restrict the shooter's access to firearms after he repeatedly demonstrated violent behaviors and interest in executing school shootings. In fifty-one percent of mass shootings, the shooter displays warning signs before the shooting.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School looked and functioned disturbingly similarly to Staples High School, where I spend the bulk of my waking hours. Affluent, suburban, and, it would seem to many, untouchable. And yet, the deathbed of seventeen students and educators. The carnage there was preventable. A strong extreme risk law would have saved them all.

If it can happen there, can't it happen here?

Please don't let it happen here.

As I write about my high school, with its lockers perfect for hiding, I urge you to also remember those disproportionately impacted by gun violence and the daily scourge of gun violence in our communities. Gun violence is the leading cause of death for American children and teens, and Black American children and teens are 14 times more likely to die by gun

homicide than their white counterparts. Those belonging to minority groups and women — especially women in abusive relationships — are dying every day with bullet holes in their bodies. In addition, having access to a firearm triples the likelihood of death by suicide. Here in Connecticut, we saw a fourteen percent decrease in our firearm suicide rate after enforcing the extreme risk law that we do have. One study found that one suicide was prevented for every eleven gun removals carried out under the law. We could prevent even more deaths if we strengthened our legislation.

Unfortunately, we cannot deny that there are communities and individuals who do not feel comfortable going to law enforcement for help. We must provide our neighbors with a way to take quick action when they see a loved one who has access to firearms exhibiting signs of violent behavior. Family and household members and healthcare professionals are often the first to know when community members display warning signs of violence, and allowing them a safe way that they feel comfortable using to avoid that violence is crucial and life-saving.

Of course, there should be no more risk of imminent harm in order for someone who has displayed warning signs of violence to regain access to firearms. HB-6355 would require a court hearing to ensure that it is safe to return firearms to the household or individual from which they were taken. This would simply reinforce due process in extreme risk legal proceedings and make sure that lives are actually being saved, not just temporarily extended.

Connecticut is already leading the nation in gun violence prevention legislation, and for that I am endlessly grateful. Thank you. Thank you for responding to violence with action. But it's about time we started not responding to, but preventing violence. Our extreme risk law needs strengthening if it's going to do the best possible job saving us from gun violence. Please, make

the choice your constituents need. Please be the reason Connecticut is a safe place to live, a state where women are safe in their homes, people of color are not disproportionately victims, and children can thrive. Please show the nation what gun safety looks like.

I ask that you favorably report HB-6355 out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our extreme risk protection law and prevent future firearm-related deaths in our state. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Elana Atlas, Grade 12, Staples High School in Westport, CT